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News

Planned Cabra strand of Luas gets green light

Olivia Kelly

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DUBLIN'S cross-city Luas line, the only major rail project sanctioned by the Government, is set to carry its first passengers in 2017 following the granting of permission by An Bord Pleanála yesterday.

The Luas BXD, will run from the Luas Green line at St Stephen's Green to the Iarnród Éireann station at Broombridge in Cabra, connecting the Green and Red lines for the first time.

It will also serve the new DIT campus at Grangegorman – which was recently approved and will accommodate more than 20,000 students – and will provide a new mainline rail connection at Broombridge where it will link up to the Maynooth Line.

Minister for Transport Leo Varadkar yesterday said the line would cost “in the region of €300 to €400 million” to construct, and would be built within four years. The Railway Procurement Agency said it intended to start work next year and open the line in 2017.

Mr Varadkar said he was confident the project would go ahead because, unlike other more “grandiose” transport projects, the Luas BXD was funded by the State, not a public-private partnership, which meant it was not reliant on market forces or private finance.

“It was a mistake not to link the Luas lines up and part of the reason why that was done was that decisions were made to go for much more grandiose and much more expensive projects, like undergrounds for example, which we can't now afford,” he said.

However he said the “business case” for the new line needed to be updated to take into account the changes made by An Bord Pleanála before financing could be put in place.

“Any project has to have a good business case and a very strong benefit-to-cost ratio. An Bord Pleanála have made a few changes to the original plan. They're not huge and we're very confident that they will be doable within the existing budget.”

The Railway Order granted by the planning board is subject to 17 conditions, including the omission of a stop on Dawson Street. However the board has not ordered that power lines be put underground for the city centre sections of the line.

This condition, which would have greatly added to the cost of the project, had been sought by Dublin City Council and heritage groups on the grounds that overhead lines would have a “visually intrusive” impact on the historic core of the city.

The board determined that placing the lines underground could cause problems in extreme weather conditions which might impair the functioning of trams.

Dublin City Council's director of traffic Michael Philips said the council was “very happy to work with the board's decision”.

“When you're working in the city everything is about balance. While it might, from an aesthetic point of view, have been more desirable to have the lines underground, if that was going to affect reliability it wasn't going to wash.”

He said there might be an opportunity to revisit the issue when and if Metro North went ahead, as technology might have moved on.

The new line will link the Green line, from Sandyford to St Stephen's Green, with the Red line, from Tallaght to Connolly Station. The lines will meet at O'Connell Street. The Luas BXD will then run to Parnell Square, Broadstone, Phibsborough and Cabra. It will service 13 stops with a journey time of 24 minutes and is expected to attract an additional eight million passenger journeys on Luas each year, an increase of 25 per cent.

The board's decision was welcomed yesterday by Dublin Chambers of Commerce, the Dublin Institute of Technology and Government and Opposition politicians.

Mr Varadkar last November confirmed that Luas BXD would go ahead but said the Metro and Dart Underground would be shelved.

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